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**Ways & Means Committee**

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**HB 2338**

**Brief Description:** Concerning the administration and operations of growth management hearings boards.

**Sponsors:** Representative Hunt.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Establishes the Office of Growth Management Hearings Boards as an office consisting of the three regional Growth Management Hearings Boards (GMHBs).
- Establishes provisions for the transfer of operations, assets, employees, and obligations from the three GMHBs to the Office of Growth Management Hearings Boards.
- Authorizes members of a GMHB to select a member from a different GMHB to substitute for an unavailable member and render a case decision.
- Requires, subject to specific funding, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee to examine the administration and operations of GMHBs or any successor agency.

**Hearing Date:** 4/14/09

**Staff:** Owen Rowe (786-7391) and Ethan Moreno (786-7386)

**Background:**

Growth Management Act/Growth Management Hearings Boards.

The Growth Management Act (GMA or Act) is the comprehensive land use planning framework for county and city governments in Washington. Enacted in 1990 and 1991, the GMA establishes numerous requirements for local governments obligated by mandate or choice to fully plan under the Act and a reduced number of directives for all other counties and cities.

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

The GMA establishes three regional Growth Management Hearings Boards (GMHBs): an Eastern Washington board, a Central Puget Sound board, and a Western Washington board. Each GMHB consists of three full-time members qualified by experience or training who also meet residency requirements. Compositional provisions for GMHBs require at least one member to be admitted to practice law in Washington and at least one member to have been a city or county elected official. Additionally, no more than two members of a GMHB may be from the same political party. The GMHB members are appointed by the Governor to six-year terms.

The GMHBs have limited jurisdiction and may only hear and determine petitions alleging:

- that a state agency or planning jurisdiction is noncompliant with the GMA, specific provisions of the Shoreline Management Act, or certain mandates of the State Environmental Policy Act relating to qualifying plans, regulations, or amendments; or
- that the 20-year planning population projections adopted by the Office of Financial Management should be adjusted.

The GMHBs must make findings of fact and prepare a written decision in each decided case. Findings of fact and decisions become effective upon being signed by two or more members and upon being filed at the applicable GMHB office. Final decisions of the GMHBs may be appealed to the superior court.

The GMHBs are governed by statutory requirements for conduct and procedure. For example, a majority of a GMHB constitutes a quorum for making decisions, adopting rules, and conducting other official business.

#### Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee.

The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) conducts performance audits, program evaluations, sunset reviews, and other analyses. Assignments to conduct studies are made by the Legislature and the JLARC. The JLARC's non-partisan staff auditors independently seek answers to audit questions and issue recommendations to improve performance. The JLARC is comprised of an equal number of House and Senate members, Democrats and Republicans.

#### **Summary of Bill:**

##### Administration and Operations of Growth Management Hearings Boards.

The Office of Growth Management Hearings Boards (OGMHB) is created. The OGMHB consists of the three regional GMHBs established in the GMA. The administrative offices of each GMHB must only be located in the OGMHB. The office of the Western Washington GMHB is the initial location of the OGMHB. Provisions for the transfer of operations, assets, employees, and obligations from the three GMHBs to the OGMHB are specified.

If, due to vacancy, disqualification, illness, injury, workload imbalances, or budgetary constraints, only two members of a GMHB are available to render a decision on a case, the two remaining members may select a member from a different GMHB to substitute for the unavailable member and render a decision the case. In selecting a substitute member, the GMHB must attempt to maintain the applicable requirements governing the composition of GMHBs. Requirements pertaining to findings of fact and decisions are modified to specify that

such findings and decisions must, in addition to other requirements, be signed by two or more GMHB members who participated in deciding the matter.

Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee.

The JLARC must examine the administration and operations of the GMHBs or any successor agency, subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose. The examination must include an evaluation of:

- the GMHB's organizational structure, workload, and work processes;
- potential benefits associated with establishing three-member regional panels;
- potential opportunities to co-locate or become part of the Environmental Hearings Office; and
- technological opportunities to improve efficiency and decrease travel expenses.

The JLARC is required to report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the appropriate committees of the House of Representatives and the Senate by December 1, 2009.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested April 8, 2009.

**Effective Date:** The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately, except for Section 6 which directs JLARC to examine the administration and operations of the GMHBs.